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The ten most annoying website mistakes

Posted by [Chad](#) on March 15, 2012 in [Free Advice](#) | [Strategic Marketing Consulting](#) | [0 comments](#)

Your website is the virtual ambassador for your brand. It may be a storefront, an engagement platform, or a mere informational portal, but it's meant to attract users. The best way to have your users bounce away is by annoying them. Web 2.0 has seen the demise of most of the annoying gimmicks of the 1990s and early 2000s, but there are still some bad habits that won't go away.

In my opinion, these are the ten worst sins that well-meaning websites can commit. If you're doing any of them, you need to stop.

1. Disabling the back button

Remember when Christopher Walken played The Continental ([video](#)) on Saturday Night Live? Every time his date would try to flee his apartment, he would race to the door and block it. If you're disabling the back button, you're creepy like that. Forcing people to stay on your site just makes them even more leery of your brand. Stop doing it.

2. Auto-playing audio

It doesn't matter if you're managing a website for a band and you want to promote their newest song. You don't take control away from your users. Thanks to WI-FI and mobile, people are accessing the internet from countless devices in every setting. What makes you think they want you to drop a sound bomb on them in the grocery line? How about a public restroom? Stop doing it.

3. Auto-playing a flash intro

I don't care how casual and cool you think your brand is, it's not cool to monopolize users' time with a needless intro. If it's really cool, users will opt to play the flash on their own. Force-feeding animation and/or making users overcome a superfluous start page is just another annoying hurdle. Stop doing it.

4. Mystery meat navigation

Yes, [this is a real term](#). It's when developers are too creative by half, or make the mistake of thinking everyone understands their bizarre thought-process. They inadvertently create an interface that confuses users. For example, a webpage that describes your organization should be labeled "about" or "our story" or something along those lines. Linking the "about" page through an animated gif of a puppy is annoying, even if you're an organization centered around dogs. Stop doing it.

5. Incorporating random advertising links into your content

If there's a link in your content, then users expect that link to enhance their experience and their understanding of a topic. When that link opens to reveal an ad that usually has nothing to do with the content, it's annoying. Bait-and-switch is one of the worst mistakes you can make in the world of marketing. Stop doing it.

6. Too much text

If you send a two-sentence email to a dozen friends asking for a response, you're likely to get responses from most of them, and get them quickly. If you send a 2000 word summary of your life to a dozen people and ask for a response, few people will read deep enough to even see the solicitation. Fewer will actually reply. The same is true with copywriting. Your website should speak to the needs, desires, frustrations, and uncertainties of your users. It should do so in as pithy a message as possible. If you're going on and on about yourself, then you're doing it wrong. Stop doing that.

7. Using graphics to make your case

If you have a message you want picked up and spread around the world via the search engines, then you need to say it in writing. Don't say it in pictures or flash. Unless you know what you're doing (and you wouldn't be reading this if you did), you're making your case in a way that will be completely overlooked by the search engines. Searchbots crawl copy and links. They don't really scan images for words yet, not well anyway. More importantly, users are accustomed

to consuming content in a certain way. Sometimes, disruptions, even intentional ones, just make you disrupt otherwise-engaged users. Stop doing it.

8. Hiding content behind a temporary lightbox

Luring users to your content only to keep them from accessing it makes many of them bounce back immediately. Sure, you want to hawk your newsletter, RSS feed, and deals/coupons, but how are users supposed to know if they like your content enough to commit to anything if they can't see your content in the first place? Stop doing it.

9. Making users register and double-opt-in just to make a transaction

Like [The Oatmeal](#), satired so well recently, there are lots of third-party platforms out there that will enable users to simply and almost seamlessly trade their money for your products and services. Why would you make them jump over unnecessary hurdles to give you their money? Stop doing it.

10. Headache-inducing contrast

What makes you think users want to read highlighter-yellow text on a black background? How about light gray text on a white background? If users have to strain to get your message, then you've already started losing them. There's a trend right now to make websites as clean as possible by focusing on "white-space." But clean should mean *minimal*, not literally as-close-to-white-as-you-can-get. Going all dark is even worse. Stop doing it.

For some examples of these sins, go to [Web Pages That Suck](#), where they urge you to "learn good web design by looking at bad web design."

Did I miss anything? Let me know in the comments.



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